EMILY HECLA KELSEY - 1893-1991

As told to Maxine Durney, October 9, 1989
and January 6, 1990, in Emily's home on
Old Adobe Road overlooking Petaluma Valley.
Emily's granddaughter, Joan Dado O'Brien,
inserted notes of clarification in December 1997.

Emily: My grandfather, Elisha Light of Delaware County, New York, married my grandmother, Emily Frasier of Delhi, New York on November 1, 1848. He left for California in the fall of 1849 and arrived in 1850, after an ocean journey of seven months. He returned East three times, the third time bringing his wife, in September 1850.

(Joan: I know she said it this way, but this doesn't make sense. We would have to check birth records of their children as some were born in New York.)

Emily: Their ship, the INDEPENDENCE, was shipwrecked off the coast of Baja California at Santa Isabel Island. (Marguerita Island according to their accounts. M.D.) My grandmother, close to drowning, was wearing the dress of those days, full, to the floor, with lining and petticoats, and this dress was seen floating by a passenger who got out to her and saved her.

The captain abandoned ship, but compelled my grandfather's twins to leave with him. They were picked up by a passing boat and taken to San Francisco, where he collected the insurance, arriving well before the other passengers. The ship burned, and the passengers were marooned for several days before they were found and brought to San Francisco. They reported that the captain had purposely beached his boat.

All the Lights had Biblical names. Once we were in Napa Valley, about 1910, when we stopped to look at the names on a bridge. The names were those of the Board of Supervisors, and one of them was Ephraim Light. We think he was one of the twins, or perhaps a son.

(Joan: No, they were not related. Emily's niece tracked that down.)

Emily: Later Elisha mined on the American River. They established a hotel in Placerville, in the sixties, and later yet had a hotel in Petaluma. They returned to the East, then came West again to establish a dairy at Pierce's Point (McClure's) on Pt. Reyes, and to operate a hotel in Petaluma, the "Petaluma House."

Eventually they went to Chileno Valley, where they had a dairy. To get to it you go past the lagoon and several ranches to Ielmorini's, on your right. On the opposite side of the road is an opening and a road that goes down to a ranch, at one time owned by my grandmother's nephew, Daniel Fraser. We went through that ranch and up the hill to get to our place. It was half a section, 320 acres. A section, you know, is the size of the area enclosed by Washington Street, Old Adobe Road, Corona Road, and Ely Road.

Our house is still there with the trees coming right down to it. The place is now owned by breeders of Russian Arabian horses.

(Joan: The house was torn down prior to Emily's death. In 1991, we drove out there for her to see it, and it was gone. This was probably after you interviewed her.)

* * *

Elisha and Emily had seven children, of whom the youngest was Elisha Hector Light. When he married Elizabeth Schlake, he and Elizabeth took over the ranch in Chileno Valley,

in 1890 or 1891. That was where I was born and spent my first five years. I am told I was a great favorite of my grandfather, Elisha Light. My grandfather and grandmother eventually moved to town.

Grandmother Light's family were Presbyterians. I sometimes think my Grandfather Light was Amish ... with his beard and hat he looked like one.

My mother, Elizabeth, and her family the Schlakes, came to Petaluma from Germany, when Elizabeth was four years old. Her father was Henry Schlake, who was born in Hoya, Germany in 1827, and came around the horn in 1849. His ship was becalmed off the coast of Chile. They were running out of food and water, and were scared, but a breeze came up and they got a port in Chile. It was spring of 1850 when they reached San Francisco.

Henry went to Sonora, took up mining claims, and after three or so years went back to Germany where he married Elizabeth Rabe in 1854. He had served his time in the army, was free to leave, and left Germany after the death of his mother, and when he saw that war was shaping. He wanted to get out.

He went to the Burdell ranch, to a dairy ranch on San Antonio Creek, between the present highway and the Petaluma River, and now owned by the Cordas. The flag station on the railroad was on the property they were on. He raised his family there. My grandmother and Mrs. Burdell were friends. They made arrangements with each other for getting the children to school in Novato. The children, returning from school in the afternoon, walked over the hill and home in the dark, if it were winter.

Dr. Burdell was a dentist, pulled the children's teeth when necessary. The clamp of his arm on your head hurt more than the pulling of the tooth, my mother said.

The Schlakes purchased 80 acres, in 1880's, land where the back end of Petaluma airport is now. Henry died in 1890.

They had hay, grain, cows, sold butter, had chickens. Every farmer then had a hundred or so chickens. They sold eggs to the grocery stores, or, if enough eggs, packed them for shipping on the Steamer gold for grocery stores in San Francisco.

The Schlake children were eight in number: the girls were Sophia, Margaret, Elizabeth, Mary, Anna and Fredericka, and the boys were Henry and William.

The Schlakes were Lutherans.

My mother was Elizabeth Schlake who married Elisha Hector Light. I had one sister, Anita, who married Arthur Ascherman, who was a grain buyer for the Poultry Producers.

We were in Chileno Valley until I was five, when, before the turn of the century, my father purchased 40 acres, on Ely Road (across from Cader's). He raised hay, a couple of cows, and about 500 chickens.

Our house is still there. My father built that house, two rooms in which we lived. When my uncle came to stay we built a room for him, and later, about 1910, my mother added three bedrooms, a bath, and a living room to the front of the house. Mrs. Avila lives there now.

The first thing my father planted was a family orchard, mostly apples. We called one of our apples the "lemon apple." Ladies in town waited for those apples to ripen. They made a lovely lemon tasting white applesauce.

My sister and I went to school at Payran, at the southeast corner of Washington and Ely, where the church stands now, almost a mile from home. When we came home from

school there was sometimes time to play; but there was also work ... gathering eggs, tending to the chickens. But I never learned to milk. My mother had milked a string of twenty cows when she was young. She didn't want me to learn to milk.

Locust trees formed quite a grove there, some are still there. It was a lovely place for us to play.

My sister and I walked on Sunday to Waugh School, where two ladies, Viola Whitlach and Elizabeth Crowhurst, had a Sunday School. We didn't go to town to go to church because my father said the horses had worked all week and needed a day of rest.

Mother was partially crippled, from measles, when she was a child. Later it was thought to be a mild case of infantile paralysis. But she loved to dance, danced until my father died. The crippling became worse as she got older.

She had an incubator, first a Must Hatch. The elder Mr. Bourke made these incubators. Later there was a Must Hatch Hatchery, which became the Sales and Bourke Hatchery. A second incubator that she had was a Jubilee.

She hatched eggs for other people as well as for us. There were three or four trays, probably two or three hundred eggs at a time. Heated with a kerosene burner, at the side of the incubator. Water, just a small amount, had to be kept in the incubator to keep the moisture up. You'd go out once a day to trim the wick, to keep the heat up. Eggs had to be turned by hand. This was in the early 1900's.

My father died in 1902, when I was nine or ten. My mother's brother, Uncle Henry Schlake, came to live with us then. He had been crippled since age 16, from typhoid. His legs were partially paralyzed, but he could get about, and helped with the work. It was a pleasant

relationship between my mother and my uncle; we were not a quarreling family.

I finished 8th grade at Payran, then took a business course at the convent for two years, graduating in 1909. At sixteen, I worked for Camm and Hedges for three or four months, then went to Nevada to help in my cousin's house, and did work there for the secretary of Mason Valley Townsite, a branch of the Mason Valley Mine, a copper mine.

I came home to work for Petaluma Incubator Company, across from Hill Plaza Park. This was 1910 or 1911. I typed and did secretarial work for Lyman Byce, his son Malcolm, and other members of the firm. There were three, sometimes four, girls in the office.

Son Elwood Byce was still in high school then, later he married Jean Cameron. One daughter, Elaine, married a Skoog.

Byce's did a worldwide business as the largest manufacturer in the world of incubators and brooders. Both were heated with kerosene, later with electricity. He made them to hold thousands of eggs.

It was a going concern. What put them out of business was World War I. Here the hatchery season was, say, from November until sometime in the spring. In the southern hemisphere the season is the opposite time of the year. The war meant the company couldn't ship to foreign countries in this hemisphere because boats were being torpedoed. The market in the southern hemisphere was supplied by their own producers. Byce's had been shipping incubators, brooders, poultry food, and medicines, some of them "Dr. Hess's" medical supplies.

I worked for Byce for four years before I married Edwin Kelsey.

My husband's father and mother were Richard Kelsey and Mary McCarthy Kelsey The Kelseys were pioneers of Nevada City, and were no relation to the Kelseys of Lake County. In

Nevada City my husband's family was burned out, came to Petaluma in the seventies and bought the place where the bridge is, 80 acres on each side of the Old Adobe road, immediately north of the intersection of Washington and Old Adobe Road. Later they bought 80 acres each side of Old Adobe Road up this way, to the north. First bought from a Mr. Todd, then from his brother. There was an old house when they moved there which we later tore down.

Edwin's mother purchased land from A.N. Peters, on the town side of Old Adobe Road, and north of her other holdings.

Edwin purchased 55 acres of this piece from his mother, and planted walnuts, Franquettes. We no longer own the property. The trees are still there, but it is only a horse pasture now. He built a house on it before we were married and I went to see it while it was building to plan some of its arrangements.

We were married in 1915. We farmed. We shipped our walnuts to Calistoga, to the plant of the California Walnut Growers Association. The surrounding acres were still family owned, and my husband farmed the whole of it, growing wheat and oats, and, to give the land a rest, a volunteer hay crop of oats and clover.

Eventually all my husband's family's holdings came to us. We owned 340 acres on both sides of Old Adobe Road, but released 20 acres to owners of the ranch behind us here, for their access from Old Adobe Road. It would be a continuation of Washington Street if publicly owned. It meant a crooked fence line on the south side of our piece here, and that always provoked my husband.

(Emily now lives on a lane travelling uphill on the east side of Old Adobe Road, and close to Old Adobe Road and Washington Street corner. The lane serves both her granddaughter's home, on the left, and Emily's home which further and higher up overlooks the Petaluma plain to the west and the Sonoma Mountains to the east. Her perch is perhaps three quarters of a mile from Old Adobe Road. It accommodates three mobile homes, a spacious one for her cousin, Dora Jurgensen Eldredge. Her mother's maiden name was Schlake.)

On our property down at the creek behind us here is a sheltered area with a good spring, and the dark earth indicating it was used by the Indians. We have found arrowheads there.

I became a member of Corona Club in 1915. It had formed in 1902 as the Corona Literary and Social Club. The Lakeville Club, the Corona Club, the Penngrove Club, and the Cotati Club entertained each other from time to time. I knew Edith and her mother, Mrs. (Josiah) White, and Edith's sister, Helen White Jones, who came back to Lakeville and joined the club much later. (Helen was the mother of William Durney, who was the husband of Maxine Kortum Durney.) I knew their neighbors, the Roches, all members of the Lakeville Club. Mr. Davis, who was Mrs. Roche's brother, married Mary Kelsey, my husband's sister.

My daughter, Edwinna, was born in 1915. She went to Payran School, and to junior high and high school in town. I was a member of the PTA until she completed high school.

I was a charter member of Native Daughters of Petaluma and was a charter member and first secretary of the local chapter of the American Association of Retired Persons.

Edwinna married Vernon Dado, who was raised by the Gambonini family of Lakeville. Their daughter is Joan, who married James O'Brien. Joan lives near me, down the hill, and she

is the one who sees to my needs. She gets out more than I do, knows about things to get for me ... like this cordless telephone, and this device, on my walker, which I can use to signal the emergency room at the hospital.

My great grandchildren are Kerry Ann O'Brien and Timothy James O'Brien.

My husband dies in 1949, and after a few years we established in his name, the Edwin J. Kelsey Scholarship. It is for students graduating from Petaluma and Casa Grande High Schools. Some twenty-five students have enjoyed it. It amounts to $750, and is renewable for four years if the student remains in college and keeps up grades. My granddaughter, Joan, is president of the scholarship board, which administers many scholarships.

* * *

Addendum

Notes on Payran School

My father was a trustee, then my mother. My husband's father was a trustee, then his mother, then his brother, then my husband.

There was no pay for the trustees, there was not much money to spend. The teachers were paid thirty dollars a month, and finally got up to sixty when my husband was a trustee.

When my husband was a child and going to Payran, the teacher was Ida Denman, who was a good friend of his mother, and who often came to dinner. Ida later became the second wife of G. P. McNear, and gave her children (among them Merriam Korbel) a sensible rearing.

These are teachers who followed Miss Denman: "Tootie" Mooney and Bertha Camm, whose names I knew because their names were in the organ that was purchased at that time; Frederick McMinn of Santa Rosa, this was his first school, and he was my first teacher; Mae

Evans; Ida Marshall; Miss Jarvis; Isabel Gilbert; Charlotte Chamberlain, who married Arthur Purvine of Two Rock; Frieda Dahlmann; Vera Paulson (Turney), and Aurelia Riley. After this the school became the Old Adobe School.

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For Schlake Family, see also

Gwinn, J. M. History of the State of California and Biographical Record of Coast Counties. 1904.

Harris, Dennis. Schlake Ranch. 1981.

For Light Family, see also

Daily Courier and Petaluma Imprint, Friday, March 15, 1895, for account of death of Elisha Light.

Soule, Frank, and others. Annals of San Francisco, 1855. p. 436, 437 for account of Steamer Independence accident and burning.

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM
Oral History Program

Unconditional Release Agreement

For and in consideration of the participation by the Petaluma Historical Museum in any programs involving the dissemination of ~~tape-recorded~~ memoirs and oral history material for publication, copyright, and other uses, I hereby release all right, title, or interest in any and to all of my ~~tape-recorded~~ memoirs to the Petaluma Historical Museum and declare that they may be used without any restriction whatsover and may be copyrighted and published by the said Museum, which may also assign said copyright and publication rights to serious research scholars.

In addition to the rights and authority given to you under the preceeding paragraph, I hereby authorize you to edit, publish, sell and/or license the use of my oral history memoir in any other manner which the Museum considers to be desirable and I waive any claim to any payments which may be received as a consequence thereof by the Museum.

PLACE Petaluma, CA

DATE 12/27/97

Joan O'Brien Lyon
(Interviewee) Emily Kelsey

Maxine Dorsey
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name Kelsey Emily Hecla Light
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 2243 Old Adobe Rd
Petaluma, CA 94954

Marital status: Married ___ Single ___ Divorced ___ Widowed X

Birthdate 3/2/1893 Birthplace Chileno Valley, Marin County, CA

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) 94 years

Education: Elementary school Payran School

Secondary school ___ Grad ___

College ___ Grad ___

Other St. Vincents - 2 year business course

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) office work
housewife

Travels 34 states 4 provinces in Canada

Organizations, clubs Native Daughters of the Golden West (Petaluma Lodge charter member) Cerona Club

Other special interests Petaluma History

Additional comments ___

THANK YOU!

Emily Light Ickesy 3/2/1893 - 11/24/1991

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Family History Questionnaire

	Name	Birthplace	Birthdate	Deceased? Date	
Parents*	Elizabeth Schlake Light	Germany	9/18/1863	x 5/4/1933	California
	Elisha Hector Light	Marin Co. California	7/24/1868	x 5/29/1903	California
Brothers & Sisters	Anita Light Ascherman	Marin Co. California	4/6/1897	x 3/17/1983	California
Grand-parents*	Elizabeth Rabe Schlake	Germany	11/17/1833	x 2/6/1893	California
	Henry Schlake	Germany	9/18/1824	x 12/27/1897	California
	Emily Fraser Light	Delaware Co. New York		x 7/2/1907	California
	Elisha Light	Delaware Co. New York	8/9/1823	x 3/15/1897 yrs	California
Spouse	Edwin Ickesy	Petaluma California	4/10/1881	x 6/6/1949	California
Children	Alice Edwinna Ickesy Dado	Petaluma California	12/15/1911	X 11/18/1987	California
Grandchildren	Jean Dado O'Brien	Petaluma California	11/18/1937		

"All of the deceased are in Calvary or Cypress Hill Cemeteries."

"I cannot find a birth date for Emily Fraser Light. It could probably be found in records in NY. She was married in 1848, so I would guess about 1826-28. She probably had a local obituary which I will look for." Notes from Jean Dado O'Brien

*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!

Emily Kelsey 11-26-91

Emily Hecla Kelsey, a North Bay native and lifelong resident, died in a Petaluma convalescent hospital Sunday after a long illness. She was 98.

A native of the Chileno Valley in Marin County, she lived most of her life in Petaluma. She married the late Edwin Kelsey in 1915 and they settled on the family farm that is still in the Kelsey family.

She established the Edwin Kelsey Scholarship in honor of her husband, who died in 1949, for Petaluma High School students. She was a 76-year member of the Corona Club, and a member of the Petaluma Historical Society, Petaluma Museum and the Native Daughters of the Golden West Petaluma parlor.

She is survived by a granddaughter and two great-grandchildren.

Visitation is after 10 a.m. today at Parent-Sorensen Mortuary in Petaluma. Services are at 2 p.m. Wednesday at the mortuary. Burial will be at Calvary Cemetery in Petaluma.

Donations to the Edwin Kelsey Scholarship Foundation, P.O. Box 58, Petaluma 94953, or to the Petaluma History Room Fund, P.O. Box 1091, Petaluma 94953, are requested.

SANTA ROSA PRESS DEMOCRAT

NOtes read by Joan Dado O'Brien and her daughter, at Emily's funeral.

My family and I thank you for coming to pay your respects to my grandmother Emily Kelsey. During her recent stay in the convalescent hospital she was pleased by the number of people who came to see her or sent cards--she remarked that she didn't realize she had so many friends. She would be pleased to see all of you.

We are here today to remember a very remarkable woman--she didn't move very far in the world but her interest in the world was total and lifelong. She was born in Chileno Valley, Marin County, March 2, 1893 in the house in which her father had been born. At about the age of four her family moved to the Ely Road area. When she married Edwin Kelsey in 1915 she moved over one road to Old Adobe and remained there until she fell in July and had to be hospitalized.

She represented the values of the generation into which she was born--loyalty to family and community, integrity, dignity, determination, perseverance and adherence to a strict set of values. Her 98 years spanned vast changes in the world--2 major wars, several smaller ones, political revolution, advances in communications, transportation, health care, but yet there was never a question of who she was and what she stood for.

There was never a question that she was a product of the Victorian Era and very precise about her appearance and attire. I'm sure if you all thought a moment you would realize she never yielded to the modern idea of slacks or pants--she always wore a dress. During World War II when she took a Red Cross First Aid course, she was forced into "slacks" in the interest of modesty when she learned artifical respiration. After that they went in the drawer, never to see the light of day again. One of Jim's memories of her was a day when they were doing something on the property and she asked him to turn his back as she climbed a fence to get where they were going.

Her local world was small, but very important to her. As was proper for a young lady of her time, when she finished Payran School she went to St. Vincent's Academy to receive business training for office employment. Between 1909 and 1915 she worked at the Petaluma Incubator Company and at Camm and Hedges Lumber Co. with time out to assist a cousin with her young growing family in Mason Valley, Nevada.

When she married my grandfather she took the job of wife and mother seriously. She took pride in the care of her home and garden and put her energy into the work necessary to support my grandfather in his farming business and to be a help to others in the family when needed. She joined Corona Club the year she married and was starting her 77th year of membership. She participated in PTA as my mother went to school and also joined the Native Daughters.

Her personal world suffered two major dislocations--she lost her only child when I was born and her beloved Ed died in 1949. She remained a widow for over 40 years.

In my lifetime her world widened at bit--after a few years of adjustment to widowhood, she became involved in the Petaluma Centennial celebration. I remember she took an active part on the committee and being astounded when she went out and sold advertising for the souvenir program. She developed her interest in the Historical Society from that and also became involved in other community activities. As part of the Kelsey family ranch was sold in the 1960s she established a scholarship foundation in my grandfather's name to assist Petaluma High School District graduates with their college work. Over 40 young people have had financial assistance, many through 4 years of college from those funds.

Over the years she traveled to 34 states and 4 provinces in Canada. She would have travelled farther if she could have. She read and kept up with current events and her memory for information and detail seemed limitless. My children said they would choose her for their team if they played Trivial Pursuit. As her eyes failed in the last few months she enjoyed having the Argus read to her to keep up with the news--and Ann Landers and Bill Soberanes.

The last 20 years of her life were difficult. As arthritis and osteoporosis decreased her mobility she had many falls and broken bones. As her body failed, her mind and spirit did not. She was a hard task master for herself and those around her. Her values and perseverance never wavered and to the end she gave her best effort to keep going. She fell for the last time in July and managed to regain her walking skills and have a few outings before her last illness.

When we had her 90th birthday party I told people who said they couldn't come that they could have rainchecks for 100--we came close to celebrating 100--but not quite. I hope your presence here today is in the same spirit as the days we celebrated her 80th and 90th years--a gathering of family and friends to honor a lady who was a lady. A person with strength and determination, love and loyalty for those near and dear, a strong sense of values, her roots deeply imbedded in the past and yet looking to the future. There will be no rainchecks today--the end of a lifetime has come and we must bid a fond farewell. Thank you for all you were and all you made us be.

My great-grandmother was called Mimi by her family. Because she was 76 when I was born, my memories of her are different from what many of you are able to recall.

I do remember Mimi as a person who I could go to when I had a question, because she always had an answer, or at the very least an opinion. A person who cared about me and what was happening in my life. Mimi cared about and helped her family. It was Mimi's generosity that enabled me to go to college and get my degree, helped me get my first car and will help me now, as I start out on my own life. In time I would have been able to do these things myself, but her generosity helped me have a tremendous head start. But it's not the gifts I will remember about her, it's the fact that she cared enough to help make a positive difference in my life. Something I hope to do someday with my children, grand children and possibly, great-grandchildren. And I will do it all with Mimi's memories in my mind. Memories of kindness and love.

--Kerry O'Brien Bostrom